

The INQUIRER

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RECONSIDERING JUDAS

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Cover illustration *Betrayal of Judas*,
Duccio di Buoninsegna (1311)

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Inquiring Words

As dwellers in the West, in the 21st century, we are blessed with more than our fair share of freedom. We have freedom of expression, of faith, of movement, of association. Passover is a celebration of those freedoms, freedoms which, as Unitarians, we hold as central tenets of our being. The Jewish people were held in bondage, and Passover celebrates their freedom from that bondage. At the same time that we pause to celebrate our freedoms, we should also be mindful of those who are still held in bondage. There are many millions of fellow-humans, both close by and far away, who experience few, of our freedoms. As we look back at the history of the flight of the Jewish people from Egypt, we also remember those who still suffer from physical, emotional, financial or sexual slavery. There are thousands held in literal slavery, and thousands more trapped in situations where their freedom is curtailed. And we pledge ourselves to work for the improvement of their lot, by whatever means are available to us.

– From a Unitarian Haggadah by Kate McKenna

Easter

Beyond eggs and a happy ending

By Cliff Reed

Easter can be a puzzling time if you want to take it seriously. It is a season of profound spiritual significance and yet it struggles to escape from triviality. The secular Easter is about chocolate eggs and fluffy bunnies and although these are based on ancient pagan symbolism, most people are ignorant of the fact. For them – and for the commercial interests – Easter is a sort of second-rate Christmas.

For Christians, of course, Easter is more important than Christmas. The death and resurrection of Jesus form the lynchpin of Christian belief and the basis for the promise of salvation. But Christians too can sometimes trivialise Easter by presenting the resurrection as a foregone conclusion, the happy ending that was known about all along. And they can also trivialise it by presenting Christ as a divine being rather than a truly, fully and wholly human one. In this way, the grim and brutal story of Good Friday is diminished.

Good Friday is not, for me, a mere curtain-raiser for Easter Day. It is a day of immense importance in its own right. And this should be so, I suggest, for anyone who takes the humanity of Jesus – and of anyone else, for that matter – seriously. On Good Friday we commemorate the very real torture and agonising death of a man who managed to upset the religious establishment, the occupying foreign power, the city mob, and even some of his own disillusioned followers. And he did so by challenging them where it hurt!

He rejected the authority of a corrupt Temple priesthood, who hid behind legalism and ritual while neglecting the true demands of the faith they claimed to represent. He rejected the quasi-divine pretensions of the Roman emperor and treated with cool contempt the arrogance of the empire's local representative. He challenged the selfishness, bigotry and spite that ruled the hearts of those who crowded the streets of the city. And he refused to be the kind of Messiah – violent and nationalistic – that some of his disciples wanted him to be.

Instead, he said that God's kingdom transcends all the petty ambitions that

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With thanks

The colour centrefold in this issue of *The Inquirer* was paid for by the South East Wales District Association to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Highland Place Unitarians at Aberdare.

Correction

The wood-cut illustration which appeared on page 8 of the 19 March 'Inquirer' should have been attributed to Thomas Bewick (1753-1828).

Judas' lethal miscalculation

By Ashley Hills

Judas Iscariot has never enjoyed a good press. I should imagine that anyone who gives him and his situation any thought at all comes to the conclusion that Judas is the chief enigma of the New Testament. It is difficult if not impossible to understand how anyone so close to Jesus as Judas is portrayed in the Gospels as being should betray him into the hands of his enemies for 30 pieces of silver – just a few pounds.

It was in the closing days of Jesus' life that Judas played a leading part. Well before that time, the Jewish authorities had determined that it would be right for this Jesus to be removed from their midst: he was a thorn in their side. But as the Romans were the ruling authority and no execution could take place without Roman permission. (That is why, eventually, Jesus was referred by the high priest to Pontius Pilate.) The problem for the Jewish leaders was simply how to get Jesus initially into their hands without a riot – since he was still popular with the ordinary folk. It was Judas who solved the problem for them. Luke says (22v3) that 'Satan entered into Judas'. We might say today, 'There arose within Judas an overmastering temptation'.

Judas went to the authorities and, for 30 pieces of silver, agreed to lead them to a place where they would find Jesus without the crowds. This was a garden called Gethsemane on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. You can visit it today and see the ancient olive trees which are said to be from the same root as those in the garden in the first century. The use of this garden was offered Jesus by a rich admirer so that he should have a quiet place in which to reflect and pray and think.

When Judas went out from the upper room, the other disciples did not know where he was going. If they had known, he would never have been permitted to leave the room alive. They thought he had gone, since he was treasurer of the disciple band, to make arrangements for an offering for the poor which was part of the Passover custom. Thus Judas went out and as the Fourth Gospel tells dramatically, '... it was night'. It was night, surely, in more senses than one. At Passover time it was full moon and the darkness would be minimal. Yet there was always a possibility of confusion at such a time, so Judas had arranged a signal whereby he might identify Jesus to the Temple Police. When a disciple met a rabbi, it was the custom for him to place his hands on his master's shoulders and kiss him. That was to be the sign.

In Matthew and Mark there is something exceedingly poignant about that kiss. The verb they use for 'to kiss' is *kataphilein*, which means 'to kiss

fondly and repeatedly'. Mark this, that kiss may well have been something more than, and very different from a traitor's kiss.

Did Judas betray Jesus for a mere handful of silver to put into his own pocket? I very much doubt it. There is a certain inadequacy about that theory. Maybe the motive was altogether different. Evidence can be produced to show that Judas – and his very name 'Iscariot' bears this out – was a violent nationalist, a man with a dream, a follower of Jesus with a vision of what the future could well be like. And Judas had not the slightest doubt that Jesus could make that dream come true. He believed that Jesus had the power to drive out the hated Romans and establish the Jewish Nation in the land which, he believed, God had given to them. But he saw that Jesus was curiously and inexplicably slow to act. Thus Judas himself decided, as Thomas de Quincey suggested in his 1852 essay, to force him to act. Now if that is so, then the very last thing on Judas's mind was that Jesus would be crucified. In fact, the outcome would be the complete opposite. He wanted to create a situation in which Jesus would be compelled to unleash his mighty power. After all, Judas was a Jewish Zealot, living in occupied territory ruled by the detested Romans and there was nothing he wanted more than for all this to end and soon. And Jesus, he believed, could do it.



Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry, Folio 147v - Judas Hangs Himself. the Musée Condé, Chantilly.

And if this is so, then there is real drama in the Garden of Gethsemane as Judas places his hands on Jesus' shoulders and kisses him fondly. Maybe too there was a blaze of excitement in Judas's eyes, and a flame of expectation in his heart. 'Hail Master!' he cried. 'On to victory!' 'Unleash your power!' 'Let 'em have it!' I acknowledge that this is a serious departure from what is usually considered to be Judas's role in events leading up to the crucifixion, but there are really good reasons for believing that herein lay the motive of Judas. Why is that, after the moment in the garden, Judas vanishes from the scene. Why is it that, if he entertained some serious dislike of Jesus, he did not appear in court to give evidence against him? What more effective evidence could there be than that from one of Jesus' closest supporters? Why did he commit suicide?

The reason may well be that in one searing moment, Judas saw how tragically wrong his carefully thought-out plan had gone, and that he had in fact killed the man he loved. Judas – and he is not the only one – was a man whose overmastering tragedy was that he refused to accept Jesus of Nazareth for what he was, and sought to make him into what he wanted him to be.

(Continued on next page)

Easter message belies the trivial

(Continued from page 2)

too often rule in human hearts. He said that God's kingdom demands of us, quite simply, that we be good neighbours, treating each other with kindness and true respect. He said that God's kingdom will come on earth when we welcome it into our own hearts and establish it there. He said that God's kingdom is about love, and has nothing to do with worldly power.

Jesus upset too many people for his own good, one might say, although he didn't see it that way himself. To be true to one's conscience, to be true to one's true self, to be true to God, is the hallmark of a great soul. To do otherwise would be spiritual death anyway, so there is really no alternative. Not that the great soul courts martyrdom, like some deluded suicide bomber, but neither can it be refused when it comes to the crunch. And that was what happened to Jesus.

His message was for the salvation of humanity – meaning salvation from the selfishness that diminishes life itself by driving out love. His call was for our benefit, not his own, that we might have life and have it more abundantly. This means to live lovingly for the sake of others and so find fulfilment. It does not mean clinging on to physical existence when to do so would betray life



Photo by Tamás Schauer mann

itself. A life lived for others must sometimes be surrendered for others.

And so Jesus staggered, beaten and bloody, to the cross: a man, a human being, in agony of body and spirit, perhaps doubting at the last whether his God was really with him. This is Jesus on Good Friday; the Jesus we can identify with as human beings, like him; the Jesus we recognise in the men and women who have suffered and died for the good of us all, at the hands of us all.

What happened to his body, broken and lifeless? No one knows. But in their sorrow, some of his closest friends came to realise that, somehow, his essence, his spirit, his anointed humanity, that in him which was of God, was greater than death. And that this had passed into them as a community. They felt this most strongly when they gathered to share bread, as he had shared it with them. And they remembered what he said as he broke the bread and looked at their faces round the table – 'This is my body...' They were now the body of Christ, they were the bearers of the bread of life, they were the resurrection. And so are we, if we share his spirit – the human spirit that discovers its divinity in selfless love.

The Rev Cliff Reed is minister at Ipswich.

Judas never meant for Jesus to die

(Continued from previous page)

But so much for Judas. Yet it is worth asking if this reflection on the man is merely an academic exercise of does it say something to us today? There is the temptation to rush into judgement on Judas – this is the natural human response. But it is worth recalling that Jesus himself once said, 'He that is without sin among you – let him first cast a stone'. And Robbie Burns had this to say:

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord, its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.

A learned professor, a generation or so ago, told his students this of Judas: 'He was bad enough to do the deed of infamy, and good enough to be unable to bear the burden of his guilt'. Like so many others within the Christian Church, Judas tried desperately to make Jesus something which he clearly was not; as when we are told that he literally died for our sins as the only human sacrifice acceptable to God. How does the Good Friday hymn put it?

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

No! A thousand times no! Jesus of Nazareth was a superb teacher, pointing men and women beyond themselves to the

heart of things, not a sacrifice offered to an angry God for human folly.

But then perhaps this all says something to individuals today who, like Judas in his day have made a complete mess of their lives. If this happens what is to be done? Judas couldn't face the music and he took his life, but is there anything that cannot be overcome, turned from and avoided in the days to come? There are those whose lives have ground to a halt because of some foolish, indeed deadly, act; and they reflect upon life as they used to know it and live it and some words I once came across came to mind: 'There is no greater grief than to recall a time of happiness when in misery'. The good news is that today is the first day of the rest of one's life, your life, of mine and anyone else's. And I think of those words of John Masefield, onetime Poet Laureate, in the *Meditation of Highworth Ridden*:

I have seen flowers come up in stoney places;
And kindness done by men with ugly faces;
And the gold cup won by the worst horse at the races;
So I trust too.

And I hear with the inward ear some words of Mother Julian of Norwich:

'All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well.'

Away back in the pages of the Old Testament, King Saul of Israel lamented '... behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly'. Is there anything that a man or woman may do which cannot be got over? Judas couldn't face the music, following his catastrophic misjudgement, but to those who will face up to matters, there is life and hope.

The Rev Ashley Hills is a retired Unitarian minister



Inter and Senior weekend participants enjoy a walk. (above) Inter participants contemplate candles. Photos by James Barry

Lots for young Unitarians to do

By John Harley

Please check out the forthcoming youth events on our website www.yuponline.org.uk – they have a fundraising flavour to help the youth programme raise more funds so that we can continue to expand our initiatives and keep prices low so that as many families can benefit as possible.

Upcoming events

- Unikids holiday for 7-14 year olds at Swanage Youth Hostel 22-26 July: three whole days of adventures around the Jurassic coast, creativity, circle time and a sponsored sandcastle building event.
- FDA (Five Days Away) for 11-17 year olds at the Nightingale Centre 8-12 August. This includes following a course exploring the theme of 'What do you stand for?' Also credo groups, a sponsored cycle ride around Carsington Water and time to share talents.

Also, the Youth Programme is planning a sponsored cycle ride from London to Brighton on Saturday 11 June for young people and youth leaders. This 50-odd-mile ride will visit various Unitarian congregations along the way. Do let me know



if you want to take part or help with the running of the event.

We were all bowled over by the wonderfully supportive gesture from Sheila Jones and her family – to offer the collection from Trevor's 'funeral and celebration of his life and work' to the Youth Department. This raised over £1750 and a special account has been established in his memory to create new projects across the country.

The Wood Green Trust is generously funding our second Youth Leader's Conference at Great Hucklow – 4-6 November. This will include workshops on safeguarding, sharing good practice and inspiring activities and improving and expanding our Youth Programme. The weekend will be free for participants and is designed for our existing youth leaders and those new to the Youth Programme who would like to get involved in leading future weekends. If you would like to attend please let me know.

It is hoped that our Uniteenz youth club can receive a second lease of life. At present this initiative has been put on hold but it is hoped that some volunteer youth leaders may be interested in resurrecting it. Uniteenz used to meet every Sunday afternoon for around three hours in London – for 12-17 year olds living in the London District.

The Youth Panel is planning a Youth Sunday. This is likely to take place on the final Sunday of January – 29 January in 2012. Our idea is for children and young people to send in their contributions to create a worship pack – full of poems, meditations, rituals etc. This pack will be sent out to congregations with an invitation to prepare some worship with a youth theme, if possible led by young people. Anyone aged 17 and under is welcome to send in material. Suggested themes are Juniors: 'The Four Seasons', Inters and Seniors: 'Identity'. In October we will be creating a bumper youth edition of *The Inquirer*! This will be jam-packed with articles, stories, cartoon-strips, interviews, etc written by children and young people. Do send me any contributions. For more information about any of the above please contact John at jharley@unitarian.org.uk

Here's to a vintage 2011 for our children and young people.

The Rev John Harley is GA Youth Officer.

For 7-14 year old southern Unitarians

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THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

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Only 14 places so book soon!

£100 all inc. if booked before 1st June

An initiative for young Unitarians in the South organised by the Youth Programme and supported by the Wood Green Trust. A Unitarian and Free Christian Church Event.

Highland Place Celebrates 150 years Anniversary is an opportunity

In 2009, in anticipation of the 150th Anniversary of the opening, in December 1860, of an English Unitarian Church at Highland Place, a small group of volunteers held their first meeting to discuss a programme of activities which would be appropriate to celebrate the occasion. At that point there was no way of anticipating the many unexpected, but very welcome, positive outcomes which emanated from the celebrations or the impact on the confidence of the congregation.

The prospect of an influx of visitors prompted a review of the church and its facilities. It was Paul David, who for many years had been Secretary to the congregation, who set about organising the necessary repairs and improvements to the church building. His previous experience as a local councillor enabled him to identify a group of tradespeople who undertook the work. During 2009 and the early part of 2010 many improvements were made, some new windows were put in, the kitchen and toilet were refitted, a disabled access was added and the whole building was internally repainted which transformed, what is in any case, a pleasant building. Donations towards the work were generously given by some members of the congregation and Women's League.



'Only Boys Aloud' performed a celebratory concert in the Highland Park Sanctuary. Except where noted, photos by Keith Lewis Jones

Aware that the celebrations would need considerable local and national publicity a decision was made to develop a website for Highland Place. Someone from the congregation, who had a background in IT was found, who worked with John Wilkinson from the denominational DUWIT team to set up the website and to update it on a regular basis. Subsequent to this, Keith Lewis-Jones has gone on to develop other Unitarian websites in Wales which include, the South East Wales District Association site and the Welsh Department which is bilingual. Keith has since been invited to join the DUWIT team with a responsibility for Unitarian websites in Wales.

The celebrations proper began in April 2010 when a sponsored Hymn Singing session took place. This involved the congregation in the singing of 50, yes 50, different hymns. Nathan, our young organist at the time, took turns with the Rev Eric Jones in playing the piano and organ to accompany the hymns. A total of £900 was raised for the Anthony Nolan Trust for Childhood Leukaemia.

From the outset the celebrations were designed to highlight the role of the founding fathers of Highland Place who, in 1860, were at the forefront of many of the social and cultural developments which took place in the Aberdare locality. Three free public lectures were organised to reflect the spirit of 1860. The first in May 2010 by Dr Chris

Turner, who was born in Aberdare, reflected on 'Religion and Revival: Aberdare 1860'. Dr Turner was an excellent choice being familiar with the area and its social as well as religious history. The second lecture in June, entitled 'Radicalism and Unitarians in Merthyr and Aberdare' was given by Joe England which made overt the links between Unitarians and the social and political developments of the 19th century. Having made contact with the current Unitarian Community in Aberdare and Cefn Coed, Joe has gone on to further research the local history of Unitarianism.



A window was created to celebrate the anniversary.

The Rev Dr Ann Peart gave the third and final lecture in October when she took as her subject 'Notable Unitarian Women'. Elizabeth Gaskell, author and wife of William Gaskell, was one of the Unitarian women who were featured in the lecture.

In September, two Open Days were held at Highland Place. The event was advertised in the Cynon Valley Leader and publicity fliers were distributed throughout the locality. During the two Open Days there were a pleasing number of visitors to the church, many of whom had never previously entered the building. The church had been beautifully decorated and there was an extensive exhibition and photographic display of the church archives and the many activities to which congregational members have been associated. In the bookcase in the church there was a display of various Miners' Lamps which had been produced at the former Cambrian Lamp Works which was donated to the church. Tea and light refreshments were served throughout the two day opening. Unfortunately the Open Day Display, which had been mounted in the School Room, had to be dismantled soon afterwards due to previous bookings of the room, which was a slight disappointment as the exhibition had entailed a great deal of effort by a group of female members and was worthy of further exposure.

To conclude the two-day Open Event, a Thanksgiving Service was held. During the service more than 20 members of the congregation voiced their gratitude, by means of a pre-prepared statement, for some aspect of their life or work experience. Those members who participated produced some interesting, eloquent and moving presentations.

In October, the first of two concerts was held. The concert was given jointly by Cantorian Cyfarthfa, a highly professional group of Ladies led by their conductor Derry Prothero. It was our Choir, led by Humphrey Evans who made contact with the second choir, Only Boys Aloud. Both choirs were well rehearsed and some of the young soloists were exceptional and brought a tear to many eyes. This concert was an outstanding success with the church packed for the occasion.

In November a second concert given by four of the High School from the Cynon Valley, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun (Ysgol Gymraeg), Aberdare High School, Aberdare Girls School and Moulton Ash Comprehensive, took place. The concert included a number

congregational development

is recited in Welsh, two young female harpists, some lovely solos and two choirs. This concert was also well attended and provided an opportunity for the schools to showcase some of their most talented students.

The penultimate event took place on 3 February in the form of a Banqueting Dinner with Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas, Presiding Officer at the Welsh Assembly and Roy Noble of BBC Wales as guest speakers.

It had been intended that a Service of Celebration be held on Sunday 19 December (the nearest date to the original opening on 20 December 1860). Unfortunately, due to a very heavy snowfall, this event had to be postponed until 27 March when Neville Kenyon, President of the General Assembly, was present, along with some local dignitaries and representatives from other Unitarian Congregations in South Wales.

The initial planning began in 2009 with a small group, however the process evolved more and more people became involved until by almost everyone in the congregation, in one role or another, made a contribution. For example, making tea, and providing refreshments, being at the door to welcome visitors, decorating the church, writing articles for an updated history of Highland Place, reading at the Thanksgiving Service, taking photographs, producing leaflets, distributing literature and making contact with the press. These are some of the “backroom” activities which have to be done to ensure success. All of the members worked hard to make the celebrations a success. Moreover the 150th Celebrations attracted a considerable amount of free publicity. Press releases on all the events were sent to local papers, sometimes with photographs and without exception they were printed. This has put Highland Place firmly on the map and increased its profile within the Community.

At the outset it was agreed that a book be published which incorporated and brought up to date the two previous histories of Highland Place, written by Rev John Davies (1960) and the Rev Eric Jones (1985). It also includes some of the history of the people and businesses of Dry Town, the community in which Highland Place is situated. Finally, the book also contains the written memories



Volunteers created a historical display. Photo by Hazel Hood Jones (left). The cover of an updated history of Highland Park, available from the Rev Eric Jones.

and reflections of individuals with past or present associations with the church, thereby spanning 150 years to the present day. Copies can be ordered from the Rev Eric Jones at eric.anne.jones@gmail.com, at a cost of £8 plus £2 for postage.

Looking back on the whole experience it is clear that, notwithstanding the specific events which were organised in celebration of 150 years, there were many positive gains for individual members and the church as a whole. Individuals discovered that they had talents and abilities which they had never previously had an opportunity to realise. The church building has been renovated and updated and will not require any large capital spending for the immediate future. The church has an effective website and has “found its feet” with regard to the local media.

Reflecting on the whole process and outcomes of the event, what can we learn? It has certainly made us aware that increasing the profile and developing any congregation cannot be attempted in a vacuum.



Two young harpists participated in a concert given by four of the High Schools from the Cynon Valley.

There has to be some “vehicle” which can be used to underpin any developmental activities and we were fortunate in having the celebrations as a vehicle for this. It is also important to have an overall plan which is sufficiently flexible to respond to all contingencies. Finally, when there are numerous people involved in an event they need to be clear of their role and encouraged to take initiative whilst at the same time, having sufficient advice and support to hand.

In conclusion, to utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of such a diverse and independently minded group of individuals, as Unitarians tend to be, takes considerable leadership. Although he would deny it, it remains to the undoubted credit of the Rev Eric Jones that he was able to facilitate this process. Over almost two years in which so much was achieved, he was a source of vision, enthusiasm, encouragement and fortitude.

For more details on the 150th Anniversary Celebrations see the Highland Place website at <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/aberdyare/>

This article has been sponsored by The South East Wales Unitarian Association <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sewus/index.htm> for which the Highland Place congregation express their gratitude. ‘Diolch yn fawr iawn’ to the other congregations in SE Wales who faithfully supported the various celebratory events which took place throughout 2010 and the early months of 2011.

— Ella Lewis-Jones and the Rev Eric Jones

Volunteer behind the scenes – Janet Ford

Janet Ford, member of Old Chapel, Dukinfield, writes of her work as a needlewoman in the wardrobe department of Altrincham Garrick Theatre.

Since childhood I became aware of the many volunteering roles of my parents, not just in the Unitarian movement but in the wider community. So when I was in my teens I never thought of all the work as a Sunday school teacher and secretary to the UYPL as volunteering. I look back at my family history since the seventeen hundreds and realise how much my ancestors have been involved with Old Chapel, Dukinfield and surrounding Unitarian Churches. So one can perhaps say it is in my blood to be a volunteer!

Old Chapel, Dukinfield has produced a pantomime since the end of the Second World War and from childhood my love of the stage has grown. From a fairy to various adult characters, costumes have played a big part, so I have designed and created costumes not just for myself, but for others.

I became involved with the Altrincham Garrick Theatre in the late eighties going to watch the various productions. The costumes were out of this world, all



Janet Ford with Mike Shaw in the work room at the Altrincham Garrick theatre.

being made by the wardrobe volunteers, except for a small number being hired from costumers.

The person in charge of the wardrobe is Mike Shaw. His designs and creations he gives us to work on are fantastic. There are stacks of rolls of materials from cottons, lining, nets, sequined, laced, velvets and imitation fur fabric, some costing over £90 a metre! A haberdasher's set of drawers contains cottons, needles, pins, elastic, sequins, jewelled stones, pearls, Velcro, buttons, patterns and much more, a treasure store.

Many costumes I have worked on have been created for Medieval, Plantagenet, Tudor, Victorian, Edwardian fashions through to the present date. To work on a piece of material, a motif appliqué and then sequins and stones hand stitched on top, you feel as if all your workmanship has been worthwhile. The audiences never realise how much is done by the

volunteers in wardrobe and all the detail of the costumes. Recently we have displayed the costumes in the foyer and as I do front of house I try and promote the wardrobe work. People are so surprised that quality and variety are made by the volunteers.

As May sees the season coming to an end we do not stop behind the scenes, especially in wardrobe. During June, July and August we start work on the designs and creating the pantomime costumes, also the coming seasons' productions. On many occasions Old Chapel have benefited from the pantomime costumes and stage props no longer required by the Garrick. It is a wonderful way to spend an afternoon – nine of us beaver away at sewing machines, overlockers, hand sewing and using the glue gun, it isn't just the craft work but the friendships formed over the years.

Driver on demand

When David Knight retired, rather more than 10 years ago, he looked around for something useful to do with his free time. A friend suggested that he make contact with a local organisation, 'Hands', or Help-a-Neighbour-in-Distress. Thus he became a volunteer driver, ready to take less mobile or elderly people to appointments with doctors or dentists or wherever they needed to go. Now 75, he is still putting his driving skills – and his new Toyota – at the service of others. Today his regular task is to take an elderly woman to her synagogue in Surbiton every Tuesday. He goes in with her for a cup of coffee and then heads off to join a friend for lunch before collecting her for the return journey.

David, who lives in Twickenham and is a member of the Richmond and Putney congregation, has been a Unitarian for the past 25 years. He tried other denominations in the past but did not care for the lack of tolerance and the arguments about issues such as homosexuality. The Unitarian readiness to accept gay people is, for him, one of the Movement's attractions.



David Knight

Helping Hands

This year the General Assembly is celebrating volunteers.

Traditionally many Unitarians have worked in a voluntary capacity for the good of the wider society. They still do. In this series we shall focus on just a few of them who are demonstrating the social responsibility that is one of the threads of Unitarianism.

To suggest a volunteer's story, contact Kate Taylor on:

kate@airtime.co.uk

Spreading faith, one 'tweet' at a time

By Linda Hart

It started over 15 years ago. A half-marathon went by the church on a Sunday morning, trapping us all there for the half hour after the service whilst the runners came by. There seemed nothing more to do than to go outside and cheer them on. We were clapping and whooping and I thought to call out 'The race is not always to the swiftest!' A woman probably in her early 40's who had been at a plodding pace, flung her arms into the air above her head Rocky style, shouted 'YES!', and picked up her pace.

The idea was born. A sermon in seconds.

In another church some years later, we had a yearly race that went past the church. The 50,000 runners and walkers came by over many hours, and it always seemed that we should be out there with signs that cheered them on and gave them a taste of our theology. I wanted to (but never managed) some sermons in seconds to put ourselves in front of the community just a little more. We did do some rhyming signs for a few years in the style of the old American 'Burma Shave' signs, but never the quick, one-sentence style.

So, recently as I was thinking about what I might do with my Twitter account, and having been inspired by a few colleagues

who had been conscientious about getting out onto the web, it seemed a natural.

I've taken it on as a daily practice. Every morning I scan through an old sermon or prayer and find a line that sums up an important idea. I edit it to fit the format of 144 characters, and post it. The Tweet appears on Twitter, of course, but also comes up on my Facebook page, and on the page for my church, Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church.

I've invited colleagues to join me, and a few have. I hope more will – perhaps even you – so we can spread a little of our Unitarian ethos, and maybe a few good ideas around.

Some Tweets:

The promise of new days, a new start, a new hope: knowing that beginning again, loving again, trying again is possible.

Don't forget: Every act of kindness & compassion is one with the infinity of creation and cannot be lost.

For a moment, glimpse the truth of the web that connects all & in a small part of the heart feel the love and be at peace.

The world's troubles are overwhelming, there is more than you can ever fix & it is important that you find what you can do and do it.

The Rev Linda Hart is minister at Richmond. Her Twitter feed is at: @revlahart or at www.twitter.com/#!/revlahart

Oldham Unitarians try Taizé worship

By Bob Pounder

Taizé is a style of worship that originates from the village of Taizé, in Burgundy, France. And on Saturday, 5 February, friends and members of Oldham Unitarian Chapel, were introduced to this ecumenical form of worship by The Rev Jeff Gould and Catherine Fozard.

Speaking to an audience of 30, Jeff explained that the Taizé style of worship originated from the Ecumenical Taizé community founded at the end of the Second World War, by Brother Roger, a Protestant, who later became the prior of the community. Brother Roger was in Taizé during the war years and provided refuge and assisted Jews escaping Nazi persecution. He was frequently questioned by the Gestapo.

Jeff explained that the the repetitive chants and music of Taizé worship with candlelight create an atmosphere conducive to a deeper sense of devotion, saying 'Taizé provides an opportunity to seek communion with God through common prayer, singing and personal reflection.' This inclusive worship has been embraced by the Church Universal and Unitar-

ians also enjoy and appreciate this devotional approach. The Unitarian Christian Association is promoting Taizé. Indeed, Jeff said, 'Taizé worship is one of the gifts that the UCA is offering to Unitarian and Free Christian congregations and was being very well received'.

The morning session began with a film depicting the Taizé community. Thousands of young people, every year, from all over the world visit Taizé, and for a few short days become part of the community, joining in the worship, the discussions, the social life and the chores of cleaning and cooking with joy and enthusiasm. During the height of the summer there could be as many as 6000 visitors within the community.

Jeff involved everybody in singing the Taizé chants which are ecumenical and *international* as we were encouraged to sing in different languages. Even those of us who could speak only English found we could join in singing in French, German and even Catalan! It seemed that Latin was the easiest language to get around the tongue but the crescendo was most apparent when *El Senyor* was sung in English; 'In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice!' The afternoon session concluded in a full candlelit Taizé service. The closing song however, was not a Taizé chant but a well known hymn: 'The Day Thou Gavest' taken from *Hymns for Living*.

The Rev Bob Pounder is minister at Oldham.



Photograph by Ian Tilton

FAITH AND FREEDOM

This journal, published by the Harris Manchester College Old Ministerial Students' Association, is looking for a new editor. For further information please contact Rev. Peter Godfrey at petergodfrey224@btinternet.com Deadline 1 May

Letters to the Editor

Celtic Connections

link Jesus and Buddha

To the Editor:

I was interested to read Jim Sanderson's piece in *The Inquirer* (2 April), asking if Jesus was a 'bodhisattva', enlightened one. The term is quite common in Celtic Christianity. In Llangwnadl in Lleyn, there is a beautiful pilgrims' church over the 6th century grave of Gwynhoedl, 'He of the Enlightened Life'. Shining or enlightened is, of course, the meaning of the name 'Gwen'.

Jim's article brought to mind an occasion when I was in a group studying the Pali Scriptures (English Translation) and we came across the tale of the 'Prodigal Son'. The similarity of the Christian and Buddhist texts – in places word for word – was astonishing. There was undoubtedly teaching material from Buddhism entering Christianity but this is not evidence of wide-ranging compatibility. The best we can say is that in the practice of both religions there are areas of common experience; one may meditate in a place of worship without bothering which culture moves you to do this. There is limited mileage

in trying to align the birth stories of Buddha and Jesus or looking for similarities between Christian and Buddhist metaphysics. But it can be very helpful for a Christian to try to understand Buddha's attitude in relation to God, or for a Buddhist to study the Sermon on the Mount.

A couple of years ago, I attended a lecture about good Jewish boys and girls who had donned the saffron robe and became leading lights in Western Buddhist monasteries. The mainly orthodox audience was utterly perplexed as to how (in the case of men in the Orthodox tradition) they were losing such good 'rabbi material'. It brought to mind the first reaction, the horror of Venerable Summedho (formerly abbot of Amarati, Berkhamsted) when his 'best' nun announced she was leaving to become a Christian. Both these examples are a wake-up call in which the courage of the individual has something profound to say to us all when we become a little too comfortable in our religious traditions.

Graham Murphy
Liverpool

David Monk was a mentor and friend

To the Editor:

I have just received my *Inquirer* and was so saddened to read of the death of David Monk.

I thought of him as my 'Meditation Mentor' first at Unitarian College, Manchester, then at Meditational Fellowship weekends. He was also a good friend.

David introduced me and taught me so much about the value of meditation, which has so enriched my life and my understanding of myself that it forms the basis of all that I do at Haughland House. Thank you David. Your legacy will live long.

Lesley Mckeown

Haughland House, Shapinsay, Orkney

Vegetarian sleepers take note

To the Editor:

You may be pleased to note in the GA Summary Report that the Nightingale Centre has 'increased sleeping capacity by three, and established herb and vegetable beds'.

The Rev David Skelton
Willesborough

Perhaps Unitarians have not 'got religion'

By Alan Ruston

Sue Woolley's article (5 February *Inquirer*) on making our worship more lively, possibly adopting aspects of Baptist practice, reflects a long-standing Unitarian concern that regularly reoccurs in columns of *The Inquirer*. Our worship is generally recognised as intelligent and reflective but has rarely been said to be vibrant with energy and engaging a variety of the emotions. In the 19th century our critics said we were dry as dust with no living fire.

Our aim is to be rational and in tune with modern thinking – as we play down the emotional aspects in worship it does not make us widely attractive to the public. We realise this of course, but don't feel we should change our core principles just to attract. Yet at the same time our innate seriousness (it can't be called anything else) bothers us. We ask why can't we be different but remain the same? This is a troubling part of our group psychology which is why when the issue is brought up from time to time it gets a ready response.

In June 1987, *The Inquirer* aired an aspect of the subject. Joy Croft had apparently told a story at one of our gatherings of a woman who came into a rather formal church and burst out 'Amen' during the sermon at statements with which she agreed. When asked if she was ill, she replied, 'No, no, I got religion.' Joy asked – how would your congregation have reacted? I responded that 20 years or so before this very thing

had happened at Newington Green, when an elderly man came in for the evening service. At appropriate times throughout the service he shouted 'Alleluia, Praise the Lord', plus assorted 'amens'. It was shocking at first but by the end of the service the congregation had got used to it and didn't find it so dreadful – it clearly came from the heart.

It has never happened again in my experience at any Unitarian service I've attended since. But I hope it might. Has our reason triumphed over the immediacy, the liveliness, maybe even the joy that our worship and meeting together should evoke in us? I hope not as it's not our theology that gets in the way but our attitude towards our worship that we need to look at. Solemnity has its right and proper place but it's only one aspect of religious celebration, not the whole.

I'd like to think that we could get happy (not necessarily clappy) and 'get religion' which is an emotional reaction to our experience. We're not always even certain we like jokes and the like during worship. Perhaps we don't need to change what we attempt to put over but rather our attitude towards it. Couldn't our psychology with advantage move just a little to be more like the woman Joy Croft recalled? Can we get religion but with a rational approach. Is it feasible? We won't know unless we try.

Alan Ruston is a member of the Watford Unitarian Fellowship.

Music Society found 'heaven' at Hucklow

By Joy Croft

There wasn't an empty bed anywhere in the Nightingale Centre. In fact, there was scarcely one left in the village of Great Hucklow. Building on the success of last year's first February conference and adding some effective publicity, the Music Society achieved a bumper attendance of more than 50 enthusiastic singers, players and cheerers-on. Ten were first-time attenders. The conference title, 'Catching Heaven in a Note' comes from a hymn in *Sing Your Faith*, 'For the Music of Creation'. If your congregation hasn't tried that one yet, have a go. We sang it in our opening session, and it set a joyful tone for the next three days.

Most of the conference was a hands-on exploration of how the world's religious traditions celebrate the spirit of life in melody. Jo Rogers started us off with a round-the-world tour of songs and mantras. Then, Adie Wilson and Nick Morrice immersed us in the World of Chant, Josh Johnston taught us choral arrangements of spirituals, Richard Merritt had us making up percussion backings to hymns and readings from *Sing Your Faith* (Try it next time you're short of an organist!), and David Dawson set one of Richard Gilbert's meditations to an Indian rag so that we could sing and play ourselves inside those previously unfamiliar eastern soundscapes.

There was some room for our personal tastes as well when Penny Jonson invited us to share a piece of music which for each of us seemed to catch heaven in a note. Offerings ranged from the finale of Saint-Saens' Organ Symphony to the hillbilly-esque "I'll be Lonely at Christmas", composed and sung by Hewardine children and recorded as a Christmas gift for John. As always, on the final evening, there was a DIY concert of music, poems and stories. This time, Helen Copley caught the whole evening on her sound recorder; so now some of us have our own performances immortalized on CD. And finally, there was the moving conference service: items selected from the preceding sessions and woven together by



Participants gathered to 'Catch Heaven in a Note'. Photo by John Hewardine

quotes describing the power of music – a genuinely worshipful experience in which everyone was both giver and receiver.

I had a wonderful time; I think we all did – newcomers and old timers alike. What impressed me most was how quickly this conference became a community. There is something magical about the power of music to bind people together, soul to soul. Like many *Inquirer* readers, I belong to the generation that chanted, 'Make Love, not War.' – still not a bad idea. But I begin to think the most effective way to world harmony is for people and peoples to stop fighting and make music together. As Khalil Gibran put it, *Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life, bringing peace, abolishing strife.*

The Music Society's next conference is 25-28 August at the Ammerdown Centre in Somerset. It will have a different theme and programme, but I can guarantee you the same absolutely unbeatable atmosphere of creative fellowship. If you'd like to join in, contact Secretary Adrienne Wilson: email adie@adiewilson.co.uk or telephone 01483 421905.

The Rev Joy Croft is a retired Unitarian minister.

Bury St Edmunds celebrates perseverance

Martin Gienke, lay minister of the Bury St Edmunds Unitarian congregation, ascended the 300-year-old pulpit in the Unitarian Meeting House as part of a special service on 6 March to mark the building's anniversary.

'Blessed are those who Persevere' was the theme of the service which celebrated those who persevered in building the 'Chappell in Churchgate St' in 1711 – enduring persecution, secret gatherings and the wrath of the established church. It also celebrated those who persevered in restoring the building from 1968-1991.

Martin climbed the ancient steps to the pulpit to read a passage from the Rev Samuel Bury's sermon which was given at the opening service on 30 December 1711, nine months after construction began.

The Rev Bury cited the difficulties at home and abroad in 1711, economic failures, and infectious distemper – not far away from Afghanistan, recession and swine flu today. Martin said 'I rarely preach from the pulpit because it is so high; I prefer to be at the same level as my congregation.'



Lay Minister, Martin Gienke ascending the stairs and in the pulpit which was installed in the Bury St Edmunds Unitarian Meeting House in 1711.

Space available on Worship Studies course

By Dawn Buckle

Alexandra Buchanan, a worship leader in Merseyside District, took the National Worship Studies Course Foundation Step last year and highly recommends it. 'For me, the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step offered the opportunity to reflect on my own faith, to learn more about the faith of others and to consider best how to share this with a congregation. Most importantly, it made me think more about the purpose of worship, in developing our sense of community whilst supporting each individual member (and visitors) on her or his spiritual journey.

'It was interesting and invigorating to meet with others in similar positions from all across the country and to hear about their personal triumphs and disasters, as well as ongoing challenges. I learned a lot from their different perspectives ('Where do you put the notices?' 'Do you say or sing the Lord's Prayer, and how do you introduce it?' 'How do you time-manage candles of joys and concerns?'), reinforcing my sense of a diversity, yet essential unity of Unitarian congregations throughout the UK. I'd thoroughly recommend it to anyone starting out in ministry, thinking of taking that step, or an old hand wanting to go back to basics.'

There are still places on the National Worship Studies Course Foundation Step, run by the Joined-Up Education Panel, to be held in Manchester on four Sundays in summer.

This is the course for you if:

- You want to lead a service and you're not sure how.
- You want help finding and writing prayers or where to find suitable readings, including on the internet.
- You want to discuss what worship is and how to create addresses or sermons that are inspiring and relevant.



The Worship Studies group with the Rev David Shaw (centre) and Dawn Buckle (on right).

- You want to be warned about practicalities and precautions and to improve your speech and communication in worship. You want to tell stories better and involve children in worship and to choose suitable hymns, songs or other music.

On successful completion of the course and two assessed services, you will receive the Education and Training Commission's Foundation Step, Worship Studies Course certificate. The dates are: Saturday 21 May, 4 and 18 June and 2 July from 10 am to 4 pm. Registration is £5 and the sessions are £10 each.

For more details and an application form contact Dawn Buckle
Tel: 01457 763 721 E-mail: dawnbuckle@ymail.com

Dawn Buckle is convenor of the General Assembly's Joined-Up Education Panel.

Ministry Inquiry Days

Want to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian minister or lay pastor/leader and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Commission is again holding Inquiry Days for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

London, Essex Church, Kensington: Saturday, June 11th
Manchester, Luther King House: Wednesday 24th August
Times for both venues: 11 for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadlines: June 1st for London and 14th August for Manchester.
Advance booking essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:
Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,
1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk